DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 386 SP 037 302

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TITLE Hearing the Voices of Hispanic Preservice Teachers: An Inside-Out Reform of Teacher Education.
PUB DATE 97
NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Hispanic Americans; *Mentors; Minority Group Teachers; Multicultural Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Professional Development; Student Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS Hispanic American Students; Preservice Teachers; Texas A and M University

ABSTRACT

This study of cultural self-identity is based on stories of mentorship drawn from a 6-month study of 11 female Hispanic preservice teachers enrolled in degree programs at Texas A&M University. These students were interviewed about mentoring influences that contributed to their decision to become teachers, about sponsorship and assistance personally available on campus, and about the various mentoring contexts they encountered, organizations to which they belonged, and the nature of their own work. Notably, participants stressed professional development in the context of parental and family support. They articulated needs in the following areas of professional development: interaction among diverse cultures within campus communities; an official bilingual education program at the undergraduate level; opportunity to talk about issues related to teaching within Hispanic and non-Hispanic (culturally-mixed) organizations; leadership training within Hispanic mentoring organizations; a deeper understanding of the Hispanic culture to dissipate stereotypes such as those governing special rewards and privileges; in depth learning about other cultures; and more empowering and transformative language. These professional development perspectives underscored the need for sufficient support in the areas of advisement, counseling, and leadership. (Contains 35 references.) (JLS)

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Hearing the Voices of Hispanic Preservice Teachers:

An Inside-Out Reform of Teacher Education

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Paper presented at the Hispanic SIG, "Preservice Preparation and Professional Development of Hispanic Teachers," American Educational Research Association, Chicago, March 1997

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Hearing the Voices of Hispanic Preservice Teachers:

An Inside-Out Reform of Teacher Education

Author's Biography

Carol A. Mullen is Research Associate at Florida State University. She was Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Texas A&M University during this study. Both her teaching and research interests explore the topics of mentorship, diversity, and creativity within universities and prisons. Her forthcoming book, with others, is *Breaking the Circle of One: Redefining Mentorship in the Lives and Writings of Educators* (Peter Lang Publishing, Counterpoints Series). Her applications of prison contexts and correctional processes to teacher education have been recently published in *Imprisoned Selves: An Inquiry into Prisons and Academe* (University Press of America). Carol received her doctorate in curriculum studies and teacher development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. Correspondence: Carol A. Mullen, Florida State University, Learning Systems Institute, 205 Dodd Hall, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4041.

Author's Notes

The study reported in this article on Hispanic cultural self-identity was supported by a Sid Richardson Foundation/Southwestern Bell Telephone foundations grant. I wish to thank the preservice teacher-participants who generously gave of their time and energy to the demands of this research and especially to its message of hope. They are anonymously referred to throughout this paper. Maria Murguia, graduate assistant at Texas A&M University, kindly reviewed portfolio materials and transcribed interview tapes. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. William A. Kealy, Associate Professor at Florida State University, for producing the computerized version of the Hispanic collage (Figure 2).

Hearing the Voices of Hispanic Preservice Teachers:

An Inside-Out Reform of Teacher Education

Carol A. Mullen

The professional development of Hispanic preservice teachers can provide educational institutions with a better understanding of their specific mentoring needs and aspirations. Negative stereotypes of minority academic failure can be confronted through these future teachers' reflections on their journey of professional development. This study used life history interviews and portfolios as strategies of cultural self-representation. Based on the self-report of participants, it was evident that a strong mentoring network within higher education could help Hispanics to achieve their community-oriented, leadership goals. Such a network could at the very least assist Hispanic preservice teachers in the adaptation to large university systems and schools, and to other professions.

Introduction

> Through the National Hispanic Institute [NHI] I've been taught that if you want something to happen, and if it's not there, you have to make it happen and you have to create it yourself. It's a hard and long process, but eventually it will come about with the help of others, with your contacts, through networking by meeting people, through getting your education [by] going to graduate school, and going back to your community. Then the children who are growing will have that there for them, and it won't be as hard as it was for you (Juanita, participant interview, 1996).

The voice at the outset of this paper belongs to an Hispanic preservice teacher. Like other undergraduate Hispanic students, she has found ways to mentor herself in light of a virtual absence of sponsorship available within higher education. Universities will need to better

understand the mentoring situations and aspirations of minorities in order to strengthen teacher education programs. Professional development opportunities need to be integrated within mentorship structures for Hispanic preservice teachers who seek this level of commitment in preparing to become teachers. Such opportunities can thrive within strong mentoring networks and relationships as well as integrated communities of learners.

Hispanic students themselves can help to guide an inside-out vision of culturally sensitive mentorship in higher education. Mentorship that takes seriously their needs and values will affirm and help students. Moreover, mentorship that is an expression of the cultural self-representations of Hispanic preservice teachers can ultimately address issues pertaining to voice, equality, and democracy. Direct guidance and specific input from Hispanic preservice teachers can be elicited during their professional development journey as mentees. Mentees who learn how to become mentors while undertaking their course requirements will be given a more comprehensive education. An overarching goal is to develop a multicultural education that will "create and maintain a civic community that works for the common good ... [something] that is essential in today's ethnically polarized and troubled world" (Banks, 1996:75).

Multicultural education in this paper means a restructuring of teacher education in order to change situations of injustice and to encourage the opportunity for all voices to be heard in the design of a college education and career. Multicultural education typically involves the restructuring of schools in order to achieve a democratic curriculum and society (Nieto, 1992). Investigations of Hispanic preservice teachers' views can reveal productive and caring ways to restructure university and school systems. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of Hispanic cultural self-identity related specifically to the professional development of students.

Cultural self-representations can be used to uncover valuable perspectives on issues of voice, equality, and democracy. The assumption underlying this discussion is that direct guidance and specific input from Hispanic preservice teachers need to be elicited during their professional development journey as protègès. Protègès who are exposed to a system that values their development as mentor-teachers may, in turn, promote empowering images of the education system as a mediator of success.

Background Information and Controversial Issues

Participants in this study were mostly born in Texas, both in urban settings and small towns, and a few were raised in Mexico. All lived on or close to the university campus in student housing units. They referred to roommates as either helpful mentors or teachable students. Stories of their backgrounds revealed aspects of their present situation, and discussion about current goals and aspirations often illuminated dimensions of their past. For example, all of my participants are members of close, extended families even in the case of homes headed by a single parent. Discussion of current role models and positive influences elucidated family themes relating to the high value placed on leadership, responsibility, and discipline throughout their lives. Half of my interviewees are second generation university students and developing professionals from families inspired by a teacher(s); conversely, the other half represents first generation participation of Hispanics in university. Without exception, participants emphasized the role of parental support and familial encouragement in bringing about their emotional, political, and, in some cases, intellectual capabilities and ambitions. Those who had lost their Spanish or had never really learned it indicated that they were among the youngest siblings in their family; they also expressed regret. Others, however, were pursuing credentials in bilingual

education without the support of an undergraduate bilingual education program or bilingual speaking mentor. Even though all participants received financial support from their families or government (usually a combination of sources), most held time-consuming part-time jobs. Participants were also actively committed to volunteer work in line with the vitalization of the Hispanic community. This introduction to participants' backgrounds, and their current situations and needs, will be further elaborated in "Participant Profiles and Methodology."

Participants used a range of cultural group identifiers to refer to themselves—Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American, and Chicano (in preferred order). I have opted to use *Hispanic* for three reasons: one, the term "Hispanic" is more prevalent in Texas and relevant to the setting of this study; two, six of my participants spontaneously and consistently used this identifier; and three, the meaning of Hispanic emphasizes the role of assimilation and socialization in the making of a college-educated ethnic identity. The term, "Hispanic," unlike "Latino," connotes integration into American society and the desire to work within established systems and to achieve economically (see Murguia, 1991, for a precise explanation of the differences between the two terms). Yet, the desire to integrate or assimilate is not absolute; some degree of cultural distinctiveness and ethnic identification is considered desirable (Murguia, 1991). Each participant revealed pride in herself (for example, as representative of a growing "majority" rather than a "minority" culture). They also referred at times to the accomplishments of "Hispanics" against a background of oppression and historic struggle experienced by Latinos in their assimilation into Texas and the Southwest. A summary of my participants' views of cultural self-identity may be best derived from Murguia (1991:11) who claims that "Hispanic," as a white-identified term, places emphasis on

> incorporation into a system generally considered fair enough to offer advancement. … The term Hispanic fundamentally is integrationist with some amount of pluralism within it, while Latino is fundamentally pluralist with some amount of integration in it.

"Hispanic" was most often used in the verbal and written expression of my participants, sometimes at the expense of other expressions of cultural self-identity. For example, one participant outright rejected the use of "Chicano" claiming it to be an "old Mexican word … meaning the poorest of the poor, a big Tex-Mex person who is totally Chicano this and Chicano that. I don't consider myself Chicano or Chicana because that means being born in Texas and being third or fourth generation in my opinion." Notwithstanding their own preference, I view my participants as "Hispanic" given their acculturation within a white majority university that has a history of monoculturalism which it is only beginning to change.

Given its political baggage, the use of the term "Hispanic" is no doubt questionable and politically controversial. It is viewed as one of the "manufactured symbols … that facilitate[d] [Chicanos] individual assimilation into Euroamerican society" (Acuña, 1988: Preface, xi). "Hispanic" therefore signifies a more drastic change for individuals than simply adapting to and borrowing from the dominant culture that is represented in preservice teacher classrooms. From a critical pedagogy perspective, "Hispanic" is a label aligned with, and perpetuated by, the majority culture and its assumptions and values of white, male, heterosexual identity (Giroux, 1993). In contrast, the democratic function of cultural distinctiveness promotes a politics of identity rooted in heritage. In choosing to refer to my participants as "Hispanic," I do not wish to exclude those few who identified themselves as Latino, Mexican American, and Chicano and who clearly value cultural distinctiveness and ethnic revitalization. I aim instead to represent the

individual and cultural issues of identity as they emerged for me in a particular context defined by my participants as a group. "Hispanic," in this paper, reflects the professional development journey or socialization process of Latino preservice teachers within a general university population that views them as a "minority culture." This perception is not surprising given Banks' (1994:148) analysis of the history and political climate of higher education: "Knowledge and paradigms consistent with the interests, goals, and assumptions of dominant groups are institutionalized within the schools and universities as well as the popular culture."

A new transformative language is needed to represent "Hispanic" preservice teachers as cultural resources and developing mentors. Their experiences, commitments, and dreams offer insights into more advanced forms of teacher preparation. A transformative language underscores how my focus is "not on management but on what it means to educate people capable of a vision, people who can rewrite the narrative of educational administration and the story of leadership by developing a public philosophy capable of animating a democratic society" (Giroux, 1993:12). This paper calls for a restructuring within higher education based on "what it means to educate people capable of a vision."

Participant Profiles and Methodology

This paper probes preservice teachers' reflections on various academic and professional areas of concern, influence, and relevance. Student participants shared insights into their own cultural identity, while engaging in such constructions, first through questionnaires and life history interviews, and then through portfolios. Data are represented throughout by these multiple sources. I view these data as stories of experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), or as testimonials about mentorship, rather than fixed or static phenomena. This view underscores

an interpretive stance, one that is dependent on the meaning of such stories for both participant and researcher.

My stories of mentorship are drawn from a six-month study, conducted in 1996, of 11 Hispanic preservice teachers enrolled in degree programs at Texas A&M University. These students voluntarily participated in a study of cultural self-identity represented by their own reflections and writings. I obtained student participants' names from an advisor-counselor who had worked with this population. A list was then generated that distinguished between Hispanic students with passing grades and those at-risk of academic failure. This list was then filed until after the completion of the study. In other words, the academic distinction between successful and unsuccessful candidates was neither used as a gauge for interacting with them nor for analyzing their responses during the study. Upon review, this distinction between participants did not prove relevant even though commonsense might dictate otherwise. The degree of involvement in mentoring organizations and relationships did not differ between the "at-risk" and "not at-risk" groups. Rather, the work of such involvement merely intensified among the advanced, mature students who had overcome their previous "at-risk" academic status.

All participants were either taking courses within the teacher preparation program of a university or were preparing to do so upon completion of prerequisites. Three freshmen, one sophomore, three juniors, and four seniors together comprised this all-female group previously unknown to me. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 (mostly 19 to 23 years old). Those few males who were also on my list of contacts had either moved from the state of Texas or were disqualified from the study. Like those females who were also disqualified, males who were then students in my multicultural education course were not asked to participate. At the time, I

did not want to confuse my researcher role with my role as a professor of a course, or risk being perceived as offering privileges to student volunteers. I also chose students unknown to me because I did not want to influence the stories of mentorship yet to be discovered. My initial introduction to the study was brief. I communicated to participants my interest in cultural self-identity and its role in providing opportunities for reflection on the education program and the wider university system.

During the interviews, I asked about mentoring influences that have contributed to participants' life decision to become a teacher. I also asked about the sponsorship and assistance personally available to them on campus. Finally, I inquired about the various mentoring contexts and organizations to which they belong and the nature of their own work. Most notably, participants mainly stressed professional development in the context of parental and family support even though the university system was also featured. Even in the case of one student whose parents had become estranged, they had remained communicative about their daughter's education. In another instance, an aunt who had separated from her husband inspired her female relatives to become career-oriented. All participants spoke about how their family continued to move them forward to improve their lives despite difficult situations. Here is one such example, provided by Linda in an interview, which captures this polarity:

> My Dad went to [same university]. He's always wanted one of us to go and I thought, oh gosh, I'm the last one. He was working on me since I was a little kid so I never really ever had any other choices. My Mom is my best friend and so is my Dad. I mean I just know that I can call on them for anything and everything. Me and my brother are super close. We depend a lot on each other for sharing information. My oldest sister has her

> associate's degree but she got that after she got married. Then the second oldest passed away. She had a brain tumor and she was sick most of her life. My third oldest, she's special ed. It's taught me so much patience, understanding. It's tough living with someone like that. But I've also learned a lot of the programs that she's in. She's about a 34 year old with the mentality of a 15 year old. She's just emotionally disturbed. The forth sister, she got her degree in criminal justice … I think our family has had a lot to do with each of our kid's success.

Forms of support included parents who moved to a "better school district" when my participants as children had started school. Parents generally communicated a pressing expectation that their children would obtain a college degree. Participants also referred to "morale-boosting" from their parents as well as regular visits to the family home and from their parents on campus. Younger students in transition from the family home communicated daily with their parents. The only levels of support which seemed to vary from person to person were the intensity or regularity of contact with family as well as financial assistance. Students with less cultural resources had obtained loans and one had been awarded an academic scholarship. Stories shared about lower socioeconomic families consistently held them to having high expectations of their children's academic and professional success. Parents struggling economically valued higher education without having been formally educated themselves. The economically disadvantaged minority families of my study perform educative roles but without recourse to an academic heritage. Academic heritage can be viewed as a subtle but powerful form of cultural influence and political capital as will be further elaborated later in "Mentoring Lineage, Roles, and Activities."

As a phenomenological reflection, this qualitative inquiry describes how "at-risk" individuals deepen and further their formal education through professional development activities related to their philosophies. I had not anticipated the high value placed on community-building and leadership skills that emerged from my participants' stories. My initial impressions transformed during the study as did my preliminary question: "What is the nature of cultural self-representation for Hispanic student teachers?" Two overarching questions that evolved are: "What is the special meaning of mentorship for Hispanic preservice teachers? And, What are the professional development stories that guide Hispanic preservice teachers' philosophies of action?" I attempt to respond to these questions throughout.

Phenomenological inquiry is committed to uncovering meanings of experience and to subjecting them to close examination. It honors the "immediacy, specificity, and complexity of the concretely-existing student and teacher" (Pinar, 1994:1). One purpose behind attempting to understand people's biographic lives is to question and transform taken-for-granted ideas about human values, experiences, and situations. Existing stereotypes of minorities are one such powerful example of our social conditioning even in higher education. Participants indicated on questionnaires that they considered cultural mindsets to be damaging to their identity as developing professionals:

> As an Hispanic preservice teacher taking preservice education courses, I feel that the Hispanic population has been stereotyped as drop-outs, gangsters, and low achievers who aren't getting any parental support.
>
> My image is of the underrepresentation of Hispanics in strong leadership roles and the desperate need for support of minority programs at the higher education level as well as

elementary and middle school levels. The erroneous stereotypes that plague our society about Hispanics, particularly that of 'lazy, stupid, and unmotivated,' have got to be changed.

Reform efforts are especially needed in support of the quality of "at-risk" lives. It might be that the kind of support which acknowledges the contributions of marginalized persons to society is a surface reform. An inside-out model of reform needs to depend on the potential role of Hispanic preservice teachers as vital cultural resources. Their perspectives can offer decision-makers a better understanding of areas of professional development that need to be emphasized in teacher education and knowledge. Areas of professional development articulated by them include:

- the need for interaction among diverse cultures within university settings;
- the need for an official bilingual education program at the undergraduate level;
- the opportunity to talk about issues related to teaching within Hispanic and non-Hispanic (culturally mixed) organizations;
- the need for leadership training within Hispanic mentoring organizations;
- the need to share a deeper understanding of the Hispanic culture in order to dissipate stereotypes, such as those governing special rewards and privileges;
- the desire to learn about cultures in-depth rather than through the current general study of African American, Asian, Native American, Jewish, and Hispanic cultures;
- and, the need for a more empowering, transformative language than the existing one.

The professional development perspectives of my Hispanic group underscore the need for sufficient support in the areas of advisement, counseling, and leadership. Ironically, their stories

of mentorship often acknowledged university efforts and existing structures of support. Highlights included academic counseling made available in a multicultural service center as well as guidance within a student advisement center. However, it was also generally thought that both of these campus-based centers are understaffed. Appointments need to be made in advance and time slots carefully weighed to accommodate coursework and scheduling inquiries. My participants therefore mainly turn to professional organizations and leadership training networks for support. There are over 800 student organizations linked to their university campus! As already established, parents and extended families as well as more savvy and/or senior-level peers also act as viable support systems. However, a holistic, integrated perspective on and treatment of these various forms of support has yet to be developed within the university. Nor does it appear to be the case that students' multiple needs serve as the basis for those opportunities which do exist.

These same students who seek support in the context of an academic home also engage in apprenticeship forms of guidance. Without using the term "mentor" but rather "assist," "consult," and "guide," they perform roles as beginning mentors. Moreover, they help to guide a vision of the Hispanic community and its place within classrooms. Consistently expressed was the need to bring visibility to Hispanic role models in education for both Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. Although they did not use the self-referential term, "spokesperson," they provided evidence for being motivated in this political direction. As mostly first generation and also second generation "teachers" within their families, they communicated an implicit sense of lineage. By helping others, they extend the impact of their influence within various micro-communities. Yet they search for mentors themselves. On campus the only mentors accessible

to them belong to organizations which require membership. Each organization is affiliated with a specific vision and purpose, not the whole person. They spend time and energy investigating various organizations, their functions, membership, agenda, and vision. Time spent on figuring out the relationship of organizations to one another and to their own needs could be better spent on meaningful community praxis or action. Restructuring efforts require a perspective on these less desirable professional development efforts.

Without support and acknowledgment of their perspectives and realities, most Hispanic students struggle academically. As freshmen and sophomores, the majority are classified as "at-risk" of academic failure before attaining acceptable grades. The current university system of evaluation does not credit extracurricular professional development efforts. Curriculum makers can assist a process of change to nurture a more helpful and promising view of education.

Local and National Context of this Study

From a local and national perspective, the professional development of minorities as future teachers is of critical importance. Currently, a disproportionately large number of Hispanic students fail undergraduate and graduate programs of education (Dilworth, 1992). Hence, a pressing state-wide and national concern is to "change the high proportions of failure among students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds" (Winfield and Manning, 1992). Formation of strong partnerships between schools and families is an approach to solving the low retention of Hispanic students in schools that has been emphasized in *The National Education Goals Report* (Bayh, 1995). Similarly, the central role of family in helping Hispanic students succeed academically was also illuminated through my participants' narratives. Even with the support of families, students need to be able to consult with mentors,

or knowing and informed agents. They also need to belong to a system of mentorship which rests in the "creation of a set of principles based on the acceptance and necessity for a political community that makes diversity central to the meaning of democracy" (Giroux, 1993:75).

The unrealized resource is of those who are caring and committed to educational reform but are not yet sufficiently cared-for within university systems. Knowledge of individual and cultural identity can promote understanding of the responsiveness that is needed to guide minority student teachers. In an eight-year study of 1, 250 female graduates of the enriched educational program of Hunter College, students were found to have engaged in highly academic pursuits without guidance or preparation for career (Walker and Mehr, 1992). Like my Hispanic participants, these students relied upon friends and family for advice. Again like my participants, most of these women had no exposure to someone at their college whose specific job was to prepare them for leadership roles. Female undergraduate students, and even graduate students and professors, may especially need assistance. While women develop collegial connections, many female academics ostensibly "do not build the crucial mentoring relationships that facilitate professional success" (Keyton and Kalbfleisch, 1993:1).

What is the role of mentors within academic communities? Mentors provide goal-directed everyday activities and settings that can lead to educational success and to academic lineage (Kealy and Mullen, 1996). The traditional mentor model (rooted in a power differential rather than a flexible, interactive process of mutual learning) does not satisfy the level of teaching and learning essential in schools (Merriam, 1983). Minority student teachers have multiple needs and perspectives which need to be supported throughout their professional lives (Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, and Adoue, in press). Hence, strong mentoring networks and projects can benefit

minority and non-minority populations, as well as the future of the teaching profession, by giving support to community-based efforts and aspirations. Effective programs of change may promote interaction with Hispanics regarding issues relevant to cultural teacher identity and its most promising forms.

Although American Indian-Irish, I became drawn to investigate the microculture of Hispanic preservice teachers in particular. As a professor from Canada, I was reminded in my new encounter of the Native American ("Aboriginal") experience in higher education. As marginal-insiders, minorities must find productive ways to thrive within accepted structures of university systems whose very history of marginalization produces a dialectic (or cultural site of struggle). A dialectical relationship between insider and outsider probably confounds, for minority students coping within bureaucratized environments, the evolution of an integrated cultural identity.

In an ethnographic study of multicultural literacy programs in an inner city elementary school and a provincial correctional facility (jail), participants wrote about their cultural losses and gains. Diverse groups of immigrants, refugees, and prisoners had experienced loss in terms of their minority language status and the need to recover the past in some form. They also struggled to reconnect with their particular cultural backgrounds (Feuerverger and Mullen, 1995). Do Hispanics also attempt to uplift their ethnicity and maintain close ties to their traditions while becoming assimilated to a white culture? The degree to which such assimilation involves "purposeful integration" in the context of a "culturally sensitive education" (Hill, Vaughn, and Brooks Harrison, 1995:48) is probably critical. Self-conscious adaptations to one's ethnic identity can empower individuals who decide for themselves how they want to develop.

As I became exposed to Hispanic students within my graduate and undergraduate courses, I experienced a tension between the dominant view of this cultural group and my experience of them as individuals. Because the message of minority academic drop-out is so pervasive, it is difficult to escape entirely. Nonetheless, just as I had done in Canada, I felt compelled to discover and research alternative viewpoints. The work of tackling cultural mindsets and stereotypes needs to be connected to the life-work of everyone, not just educators:

> What kind of society will we create if we do not raise our consciousness of our being and existence in the world? To broaden our vision, our understanding, and the meaning of our experiences, we need to penetrate stereotypes, predetermined roles, and categories (Stark, 1991:311).

What is At-riskness?

The Hispanic population is clearly regarded as "at risk" of academic, professional, and even political failure. Yet graduation from high school between 1985 and 1990 decreased not only for Hispanics but also for African Americans and Whites (Stallings, 1995). The lasting effect of children at risk of failure in inner city schools is seriously compounded by insufficient community services and economic supports. African-American students are at risk within segregated schools where authoritative control is often mixed with seriously prejudiced attitudes and behaviors (Kozol, 1991). Multicultural literacy programs can function to empower minority students while targeting educational reform. Minority students in inner city schools and inmates in prisons benefit when multicultural programming builds upon their cultural resources. Provided with learning strategies for exploring personal and cultural identity, they become engaged in the work of critical examination (Feuerverger and Mullen, 1995:236).

At-riskness also clearly affects research on preservice teachers who must acquire, within traditional climates of higher learning, sensitive and relevant approaches to working with minority students (White, 1995:32). But whether preservice students (and teachers) are guided in the experience of reconstructing their own cultural mindsets or generalizations about disadvantaged (and even advantaged) others is questionable. Preservice students typically learn what is negative or problematic about cultural groups, such as the identification of school failure with Hispanic and African American students (Winfield and Manning, 1992).

As a beginning educator of preservice teachers in a new context, I was concerned about overgeneralizations that I personally might acquire about cultural groups. Multicultural information can actually serve to strengthen rather than diminish stereotypical beliefs. According to Garibaldi (1992), I should not feel alone in my concern. Preservice teachers and educators are generally faced with this ongoing challenge to their professional development. A multicultural curriculum that seeks an understanding of cultural groups as individuals rather than as a construction of stereotypes helps in the search for credible multicultural images of human lives (Grant and Gomez, 1996).

A new way of approaching multicultural issues is as a concept of "at-riskness" applied to the teacher education profession. At-riskness refers here to those sociocultural factors and perceptions which generally act to promote or to undermine the transformative philosophies and actions of individual cultural beings. My participants possess a vision of education as linked to their journey of professional development. They also struggle against a number of compounding pressures that broadly make them "at risk." Norma, for example, was a senior from a single-parent, low socioeconomic home who sardonically referred to herself as a "latch key kid."

She relied on financial loans and part-time work, yet still volunteered as the president of a campus organization of minority educators. As a freshman, she had a 2.1 Grade Point Average (GPA) and was put on scholastic probation. This last semester she had a 3.8 GPA and was put on the dean's list of academic achievement. Her cultural capital (resources, support, and quality time spent with family) was minimal compared to the other participants. Yet, she reflected more critically and expansively on the detrimental effects of labeling minorities. Norma articulated how "at-riskness" is a misused and overused term that is highly dependent on individuals' life circumstances:

> 'At risk' is a very strong term. 'At risk' is a big label. This is coming from the educational point of view. As far as I'm concerned, if I have a student in class and I tell him he is at risk that child is not going to learn anymore because he's thinking, 'I'm at risk'. It's the same thing as if you tell him, 'You're emotionally disturbed'. It's really hard because there are those kids that I would consider at risk. Those kids that don't have anything to eat at night or they don't know when they are going to get to eat … You need to show them that there is something else. As a child, for instance, I came from a single parent home, but I was never in a school where it was a regular thing to get shot or to find guns … At risk cannot be so broad. It can't be like all minorities are at risk because that's not true … We don't know every circumstance. Kids are at risk of quitting [school] if they don't want to learn about pronouns or anything because they haven't eaten, or slept, or they don't know if they are going to be there the next day.

As a further point of criticism, the very term "at risk" can literally place at a disadvantage those Hispanic preservice students who have inherited a national mindset. My participants have

clearly communicated one message in particular: that they are involved in extracurricular commitments that enable them to mentor themselves and others. They are striving to make a difference for younger students, their own families, the Hispanic culture, and the teaching profession. The point is that a network of prevailing beliefs substantiated by statistics potentially reinforces the very conditions that place such persons at risk. New understandings of "minority" identities or of the changing needs and situations of future minority teachers is therefore needed.

Collaborative forms of critical inquiry empower learners to analyze the social conditions and power structures that shape their worlds and the changing global community (Cummins and Sayers, 1995, 1996). Similarly, Wilda expressed the need for cross-cultural unity in her portfolio:

> Where I'm from the so-called minority (Hispanics) are the majority. No matter what nationality you are there needs to be more teachers to help unite children. We should concentrate on how we are all alike instead of labeling each other and voicing our differences. Through this project I realized that I want to know more about my culture. It is very special to me I now realize. I would like to learn more about other cultures also.

Wilda's writing in her portfolio associates false notions of community with racial segregation. Her concept of community is linked to interaction among culturally different persons and to a new language devoid of ethnic categorization:

> People are scared of what they don't know … I generally get along with everyone so if someone were to discriminate against me I'm not sure I would know how to react. I think that there is a lot of racial segregation here [at this university]. People stick to their own crowds. I'm not saying that people yell racial slurs, it is more indirect. We are all around

> one another, peaceful and polite to one another, but yet we do not interact … The word 'minority' labels people and separates us. We all need to focus on how much we actually are all alike.

The local and national emphasis on the Hispanic population as vulnerable to academic and social failure needs to be presented as a balanced view. The group of women in my study are working to better themselves. Moreover, they are also attempting to gain the educational skills needed in order to strengthen the Hispanic community, and to help build businesses. Although these professional goals were clearly articulated in the interviews with juniors and seniors, they nonetheless also played a role in the early formulation of goals for freshmen and sophomores. These younger students demonstrated a beginning understanding of the relationship between their professional development and ability to better their future students' lives. My participants' philosophy of community guides their sense of purposefulness about the education program and work of becoming teachers of a democratic society. Participants consistently expressed joy and pride in becoming teachers and in teaching others how to become accomplished within a multicultural American society. After being interviewed, they were provided with opportunities to imaginatively reflect on their self-identity constructions. They were invited to stretch their thinking and forms of expression through exercises provided in a portfolio framework. A striking advantage of this strategy is the opportunity it brought Hispanic preservice teachers for reflective inquiry and professional development.

Upper-level undergraduates clearly demonstrated a practical philosophy of community-building through their active work in campus organizations and national minority-based institutes. Newer university students showed promise in this area through their recent

affiliations, such as the corps of cadets, and through their relationship with senior-level students. Research on at-risk populations typically assesses the school success or failure of minority students but without offering opportunities to strengthen preservice and induction mentorship. Multicultural studies may need to focus on social change through action (Banks, 1994) and on the reflective tools necessary to create change. Universities can be strengthened through the socially engaged pedagogy of its cultural workers or developing teachers. Finally, the at-risk label offers very little pertinent information about the individual circumstances of minority students engaged in learning at the local level.

Persons and Self-identity Cultural Portfolios

Biographical and narrative approaches have the potential to deepen initial research questions. This section focuses on the use of self-identity cultural portfolios to guide meaningful insights into Hispanics' lives in education.

Rather than leave participants to develop a cultural portfolio on their own subsequent to the interview, I provided them with a framework. It contained an original series of cues, prompts, and exemplars. This portfolio framework was designed to activate my participants' imagination and to promote further forms of reflective self-inquiry. An Hispanic graduate student assisted me by reviewing the materials for appeal, relevance, and accessibility as well as sensitivity to students' time constraints. Guiding statements and graphic narratives (raw diagrams with text) elicited from participants a responsive portfolio of images, stories, and drawings. Participants who returned a complete portfolio (narrative prose and drawings) constructed their identity within the various contexts of university, family, society, and my study.

By preparing a skeletal portfolio, I was better able to monitor individuality within a diversity of perspective, experience, and expression.

Figure 1 ("Portafolio Reflexivo: Reflections on the Interview") is an exercise in the shape of a balloon-book. The guiding statement featured above the balloon-book within the larger portfolio framework read:

> Here, we invite you to reflect on any cultural self-identity issues or ideas that were raised or dealt with during the interview. Write your ideas on the balloon (book, strings, etc.). Also feel free to write or draw in the basket or to tape things in the basket (e.g., pictures, drawings, objects). Any attachments should be photocopies or drawings of objects. If you wish to elaborate and write more, please do so on the enclosed page.

Figure 1

Figure 2 ("Cindy's Collage: Home Is Where the Heritage Is") features a self-identity collage. Participants were asked to reflect on their written and artistic responses, throughout the portfolio, in order to create the collage. On the balloon-book graphic (Figure 1), Cindy had emphasized that more positive influences need to be generated within the Hispanic community; in addition, leadership from teachers is required to meet this goal. Using reflections such as this one, Cindy then integrated new ideas and images into those which she (like the others) had found particularly valuable or meaningful. Cindy placed "family" at the visual "center of [her] life" and self-identity collage. Around this center, family is associated with images of tradition, heritage, home, success, pride, and self-esteem.

Figure 2

Cindy elaborated on the meaning of these key images on the flower petal graphic that followed the collage exercise. On one petal, she wrote: "Family is what gives me strength and courage to grow. They are always there for me through everything I do." And on another, "Through this project I realized that I want to know more about my culture and family life. They are very special to me. I would like to learn more about other cultures also." Other portfolios conveyed similar images. For example, one presented a globe surrounded by people (stick figures) with connecting hands. In another, persons were grouped around the United States flag and a fictitious university flag. Both flags had been positioned in the middle of the college campus and its surrounding buildings. In the former image, a unity of diverse cultures was signified and elaborated upon in narrative writing. In the latter case, persons were grouped and identified simply as brown, black, blue, and purple. This portfolio image expressed discontent when read in the context of the passage about how "people stick to their own crowds" (quote featured earlier).

The values of family, cultural appreciation, cross-cultural connection, and global unity were also expressed in both the life history interviews and portfolios. These same values probably signal areas that could be developed within the academic mentoring structures and relationships of universities.

Mentoring Lineage, Roles, and Activities

Mentorship structures and relationships require three characteristics in order to function effectively: lineage, roles, and activities (Kealy and Mullen, 1996). These characteristics contribute to the mentoring journey of preservice teachers at various phases of their development.

Lineage most strongly translates into family history rather than academic history in the lives of my Hispanic participants. However, academic history is, in some cases, marked by an emerging generation of Hispanic students and families who engage in professional and educational endeavors. Lineage is the source of a shared history that systematically bonds groups and also creates a context of family life in which members can find acceptance. As indicated earlier, most of my participants do not come from an established background of academic lineage. If lineage can be considered part of cultural capital, then this area of "wealth" is only beginning to be developed. Although these young women were not, generally speaking, socialized within a family lineage of teaching/academia, all of them have nonetheless received parental support. Those who had been supported by family who work as teachers, administrators, and personnel had access to professional opportunities within the school system. The role of support that some disadvantaged minority relatives play in their children's lives therefore seems prevalent despite the "culture of poverty ideology [which] was and continues to be based on the concept that poor parents raise poor children" (Sykes, 1996:35).

In a notable example, June's Godmother, a bilingual elementary teacher, inspired her to work within a bilingual summer school program. June observed her Godmother teaching; she also got exposure to her Godmother's role as director of an intensive bilingual program. Best of

all, she provided June with many opportunities to teach in her classroom for partial and entire days. At university, this student is searching for mentoring connections and members of her own culture. Although she has found a place within an Hispanic only sorority, she has not made vital connections in her classes. In a subsequent interview with my graduate assistant, it was explained to me that the Godmother in Hispanic families is a very special friend to that child, not just in theory but also in practice. Other mentoring roles and functions performed in the lives of my participants included guide, support, facilitator, friend, advisor, and sponsor. Persons fulfilling these roles included parents, siblings, relatives, university advisors and administrators, and friends.

Although my participants were mostly empowered within their families to decide for themselves which university they would attend and what they would study, they nonetheless had to obtain a university education. Juanita, for example, had been brought around to the schools where her father continues to teach. Her mother works for the same school district as an administrative assistant. Juanita has been substitute teaching within this school district in sixth grade and also pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes. She is learning to make distinctions between teaching that works and teaching that is less effective: "Now I know that a good teacher teaches you and makes you learn and opens your mind; if you give the kids a good background that helps them so much more later. They're more open-minded to things." Juanita has learned from her father, a principal and former secondary level English teacher, to study teachers' pedagogy in order to "pick up little pointers." The quality of mentorship learning within Juanita's development and character was apparent. When I asked how she knows when her own students are learning, she responded: "When I hear them feeding back, when I ask them

questions and they're answering me and telling me more about it than I asked. That's when they're learning."

Although without Juanita's advantage of academic family lineage, Norma is nonetheless quite sophisticated in her own capacity for reflection. In her interview she struggled with "barriers of language" that included, at her own initiative, words such as "minority," "at-risk," "prejudice," and "broken home": "There has to be real empathy in defining these words instead of having a teacher chalk in a definition on a board or students write it down in their notebooks. We have to get at the feelings behind the words."

Activity is a key element in the formation of mentoring relationships. But even more critical to a sociocultural context is joint productive activity (Gallimore, Tharp, and John-Steiner, 1992). The value of goal-directed, everyday activities and settings is related, for my participants, to school and community forms of mentoring structures, programs, and relationships. Activity was covertly described as, and related to, an attitude of political activism.

A concern with lineage was implicitly embedded in the words, dreams, and aspirations of these Hispanic preservice teachers. Their efforts demonstrate not only the need to succeed academically at university but also to contribute to local and global domains while engaging in their own personal and professional development. They told mentoring stories of encouraging younger siblings and relatives to be disciplined about their schooling and to set educational goals. The newer college students expressed their search for a foothold in higher education. They want to develop effective study habits; a degree of emotional independence and autonomy; enabling social skills with persons in authority, and a serious attitude towards formal schooling.

From At-riskness to Mentoring Mosaics

Generally held views of Hispanics need to be challenged and understood relative to individual biographies and local contexts. A perspective on Hispanic preservice teachers as an at-risk population does not go far to explain how their initiative and development as community leaders is occurring. Hispanic preservice teachers, particularly seniors, are developing networking links within a local and national-level mentoring mosaic of persons, opportunities, and organizations. Their reform efforts seem ahead of the mentoring opportunities made available to them within their structured teacher preparation program and higher education context. Hispanic preservice teachers may therefore be at-risk of failure within a university system that is not necessarily attuned to their sociocultural expectations and professional development journey, but could be.

Participants experiencing cultural adjustment arrived from "The Valley" (southern tip of Texas which borders Mexico from West to East and which includes Roma and Brownsville) where they constituted a majority population. They had to acculturate to their new status as a minority population at university and within the education program. Efforts to mentor and to be mentored have thus been complicated by the search to locate Hispanic only campus organizations and Hispanic mentoring figures. However, this rupture in cultural identity and sense of loss was not consistent. Two students emphasized the "big family spirit" of this university and its special traditions. Their identity is mostly that of the insider who feels accepted.

Mentoring mosaics can nevertheless make a significant difference for the better in students' lives, particularly women's. Pervasive "microinequities" foster a setting in higher

education that can limit women's productivity, performance, and advancement for students and professors alike (Webster, 1989). The role of mentorship in female Hispanic students' lives is therefore essential. A surrogate family fabric may need to be woven into their academic lives. They will need to learn how to cope with experiences of domination, hierarchy, and racism within higher education. An interesting irony is that for Maria, a freshman who is a member of the corps, this traditional context is perceived by her to be useful. She places high demands on herself for discipline and leadership and feels that these skills will help her to become a military officer and teacher. Her motivation? She wants to show her brothers and other men that she can do whatever they can do. Maria is committed to the Corp's mission is to recruit women, particularly minorities, and works with a senior female officer who performs responsibilities in this area.

Practical Implications of this Study

Given how they have benefited from parental support, Hispanic preservice teachers could profit from being socialized within a strong mentoring framework. Courses on mentorship related to teaching functions and roles could probably help support the professional work and dreams of Hispanic students. Such structures could also help universities to meet their own goals of promoting the recruitment, retention, and academic success of minorities in teacher education.

The wider educational system offers some viable opportunities for minority students to advance and to be effectively mentored. Mentor induction programs currently assist new teachers by pairing them with experienced teacher-mentors who understand the organizational culture of schools. Within this model, the new teacher engages in a planned career mentoring model wherein the achievement of an "identity transformation … translates to personal growth

and development for the novice" (Krupp, 1992:3). But professional and career development cannot be meaningfully perpetuated without the vision and knowledge of the novice. Do teacher educators and curriculum decision-makers need to learn how to take risks? According to Stark (1991:310):

> As teacher educators (and ones-caring) we, too, take a risk as we expose ourselves to others and the newness in the world. Teaching as a vocation, therefore, can become an adventure—but one accompanied by vulnerability, insecurity, and fallibility as we constantly question our reality and the meaning of being.

An inside-out model of mentorship requires that decision-makers and curriculum developers seriously consider Hispanic students' voices as primary sources of teacher education. In summary, these are some of the key ideas of educational reform voiced by my participants:

- the need for membership within organizations sensitive to issues of diversity and equality;
- the need for greater visibility of organizations that can guide Hispanic students during transition from family to college;
- the need for Hispanic only and non-Hispanic organizations to provide "training" in leadership skills;
- and, a system that credits students' professional development in excess of academic loads.

One of the principles of constructivism is that students' voices are encouraged in order to create new and more viable structures for teaching and learning (Brooks and Brooks, 1993). Educational institutions can break from the past to embrace the world at large, but they will need to promote deeper understandings of interconnection with minorities and responsibility in mentoring relationships. Hispanic preservice stories powerfully illustrate the need to restructure

aspects of teacher education and university systems more widely. However, as this paper shows, I concur with Vigil (1996:3) that "It is axiomatic that any effort to begin to document the transformation in levels of participation in minority women must begin at the local level."

Mentorship as an Empowered Learning Community

In the act of seeking empowering representations of Hispanic preservice teachers and their families, the notion of at-riskness will need to be carefully monitored within our learning communities in higher education. According to one freshman, "What makes you at-risk is your living situation, learning abilities, your teaching, and what you've been taught." These students participate within organizations that hold decision-making power. This commitment to build communities of learners supports the critical observation that

> ... universities should provide support for ethnic-based organizations and that contacts between faculty and students outside of the classroom should be encouraged. [Moreover] formal social integration will have a greater impact on academic performance than will informal social integration (Mayo, Murguia, and Padilla, 1995:542-543).

Learning communities will need to integrate the community-based efforts and aspirations of Hispanic preservice teachers in the effort to become empowered. Experienced teacher-mentors view themselves not as soloists but as members of integrated learning communities. Sixty-three teachers who comprise the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards stress that teachers need to be "knowledgeable about specialized school and community resources that can be engaged for their students' benefit, and are skilled at employing such resources as needed" (NBPTS, 1994:4). Practical knowledge of teaching needs to be linked to wider community actions that reach beyond the boundaries of classrooms and schools. The 11

Hispanic women of this study exhibit the energy and readiness required of this model of a proficient teacher.

Finally, knowledge about minority students' biographic lives can be gained from questions asked from the inside-out: How do minority preservice teachers feel about themselves and their transformation in various learning contexts? What are their experiences of mentoring relationships and opportunities as evidenced by their affiliations? And, how do they view their place and options within a large university system and higher education context?

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Figure 1. Portafolio Reflexivo: Reflections on the Interview

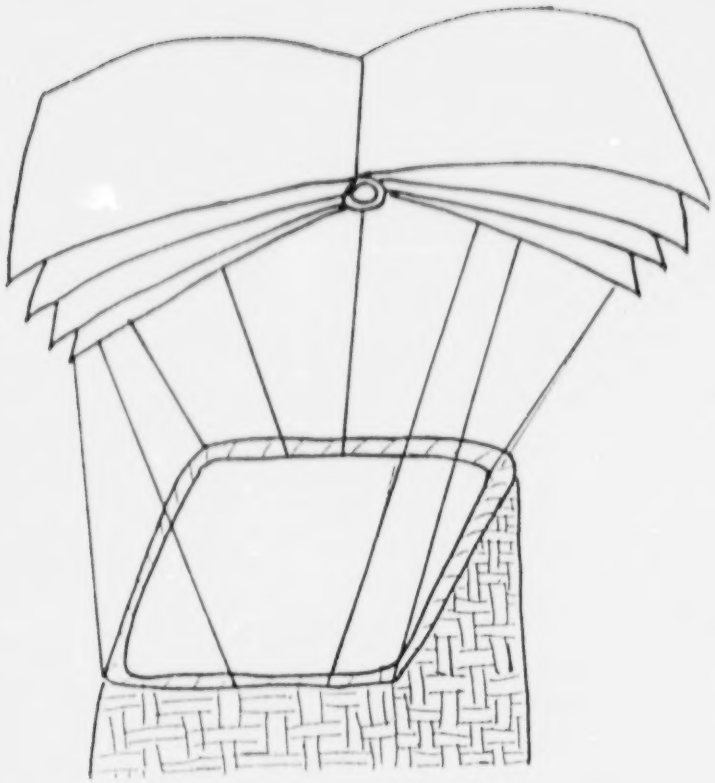
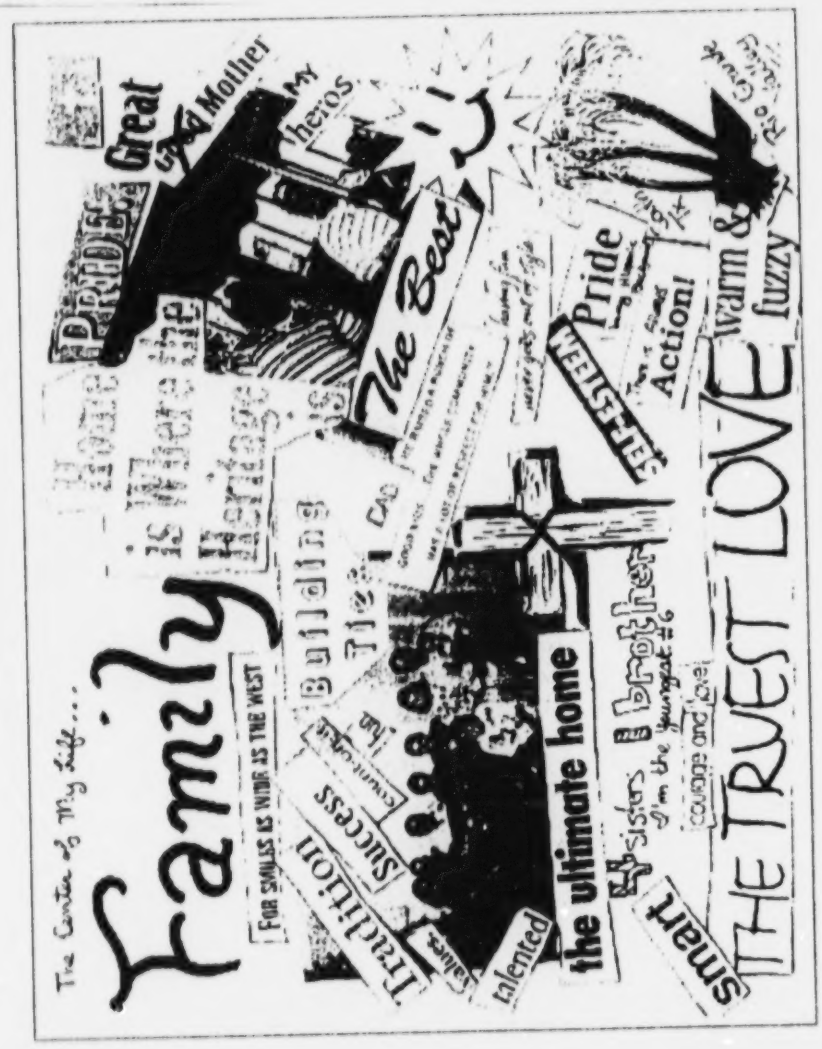


Figure 2. Cindy's Collage: Home Is Where the Heritage Is



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